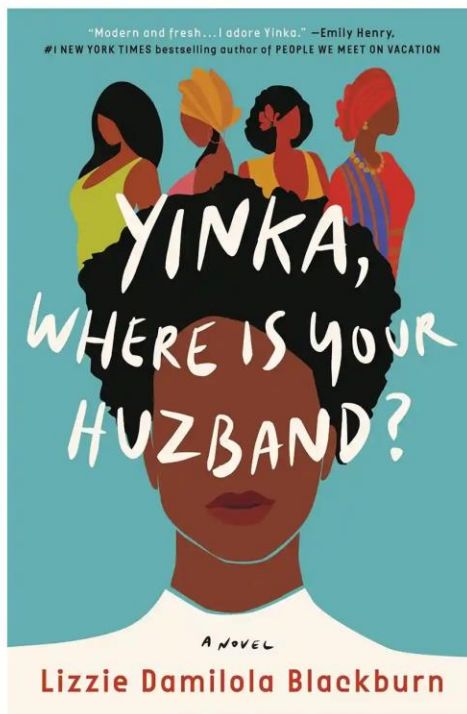
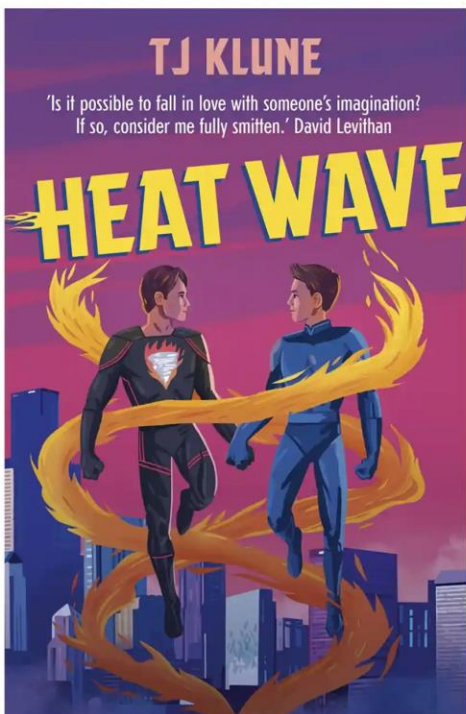
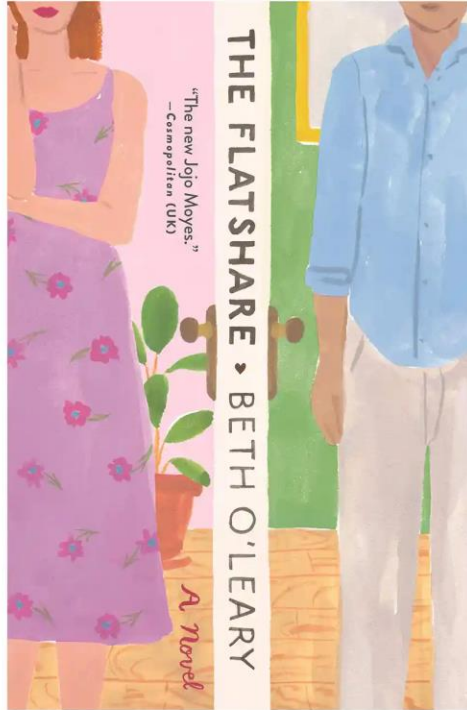
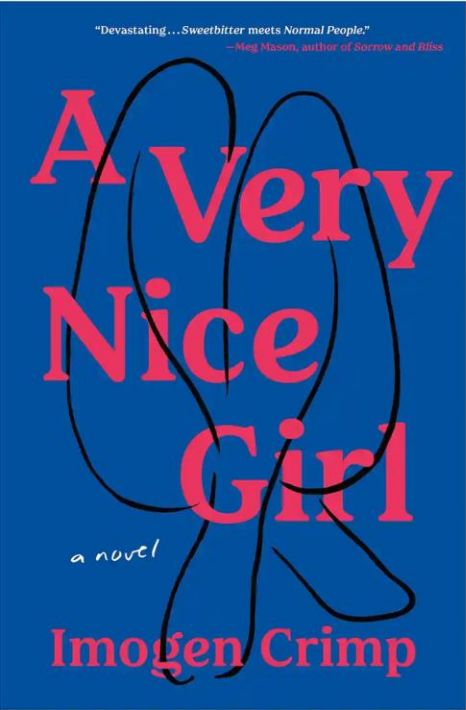


A stack of several old, thick books with yellowed pages is shown. A large, vibrant red rose is placed on top of the books, partially overlapping them. The scene is set against a dark, almost black background, with a soft light source from the left creating highlights on the edges of the books and the petals of the rose. The overall mood is romantic and nostalgic.

Romance

Hsu-Ming Teo



<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/dec/13/love-boom-romance-novels-biggest-10-years-young-readers#comments>

Romance as the original genre of popular fiction

- ◆ Genre that first developed largely in the Middle Ages.
- ◆ Recounted and written in the vernacular (i.e. the languages ordinary people speak), not the language of officialdom: Latin.
- ◆ Drew from genre of the epic: heroic or legendary adventures, often involving conflict and warfare, told in long form fiction – originally poetry.
- ◆ E.g. Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. King Arthur tales.



Structural qualities of the adventure/quest romance

- ◇ **Quest:** adventure, love, knowledge/truth, “holy grail” goals, danger, trauma, survival (if they’re alive at the end), transcendence (if they’re not), self-knowledge.
- ◇ **Plot** often includes marvellous, mysterious, supernatural, unrealistic elements.
- ◇ A “**superior hero**” (or, today, protagonist), described by Northrop Frye as:
 - ... the typical hero of romance, whose **actions are marvellous** but who is himself identified as a human being. The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended: **prodigies of courage and endurance**, unnatural to us, are natural to him, and enchanted weapons, talking animals, terrifying ogres and witches, and talismans of miraculous power violate no rule of probability once the postulates of romance have been established. (*Anatomy of Criticism*, 33)
- ◇ Nostalgia or desire for **other worlds**: the past, exotic present, fantasy worlds.

The Hero's Journey

Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949)

STAGES

1. The Departure

- ◇ The call to adventure
- ◇ Refusal of the call
- ◇ Crossing the threshold

2. The Initiation

- ◇ Trials
- ◇ Temptations
- ◇ The Ordeal (point of ritual death)
- ◇ The reward (achieves the goal)

3. The Return

“(1) A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder;

(2) fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won;

(3) the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.”

The Hero's Journey (2)

Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*

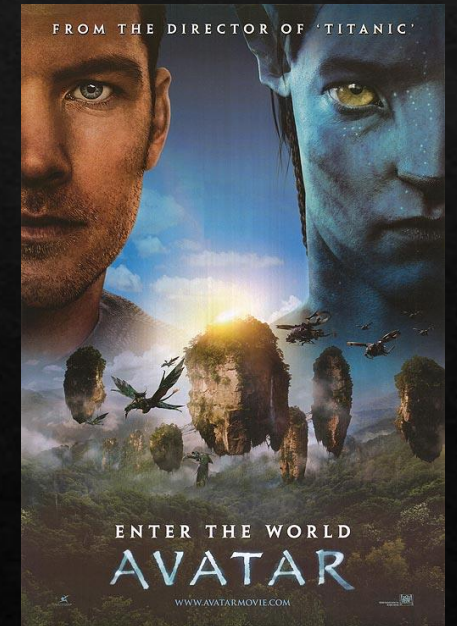
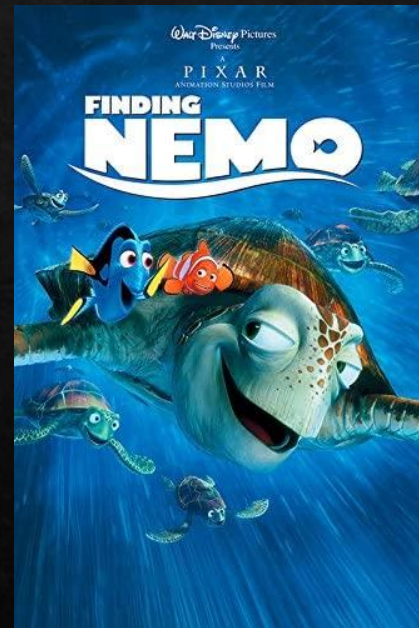
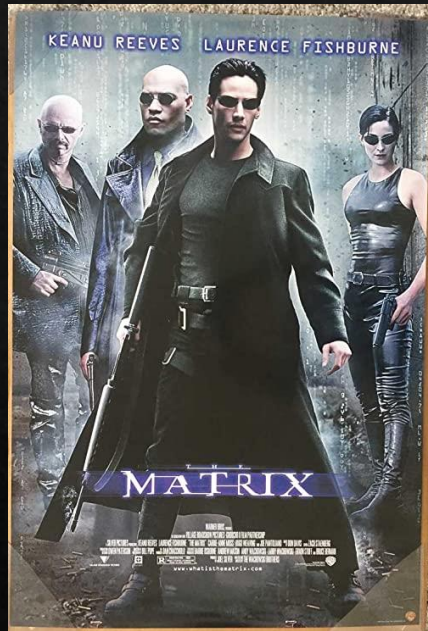
THE OUTER JOURNEY

1. The Ordinary World
2. The Call to Adventure
3. Refusal of the Call
4. Meeting with the Mentor
5. Crossing the Threshold
6. Tests, Allies and Enemies
7. Approach (preparation for ordeal)
8. The Ordeal/The Ordeal
9. The Reward
10. The Road Back
11. The Resurrection
12. The Return with the Elixir

THE INNER JOURNEY

1. Limited awareness of problem
2. Increased awareness of need for change
3. Fear, resistance to change
4. Overcoming fear
5. Committing to change
6. Experimenting with new conditions
7. Preparing for change
8. Big change with feeling of life and death
9. Accepting consequences of new life
10. New challenge and rededication
11. Final attempt(s); last minute dangers
12. Mastery

Genres that employ the hero's journey





How does this relate to
romantic fiction?

*The quest for love.
The adventure of courtship.*

Pamela Regis's definition of the romance novel

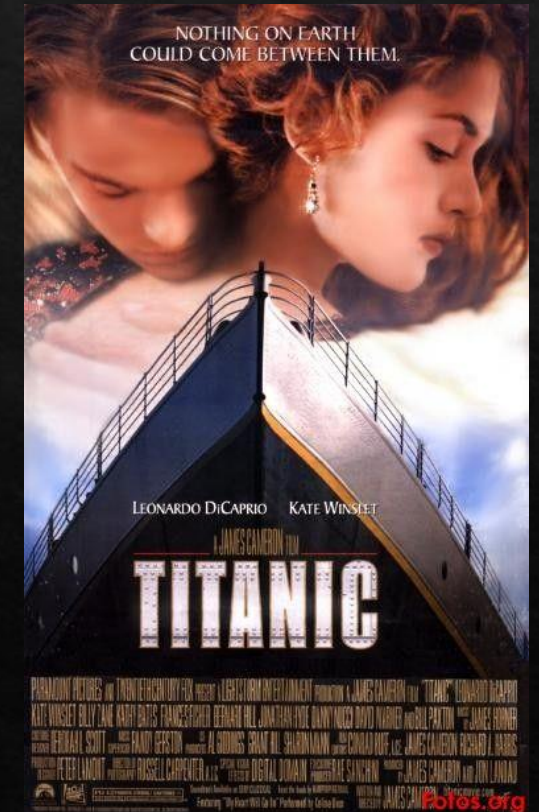
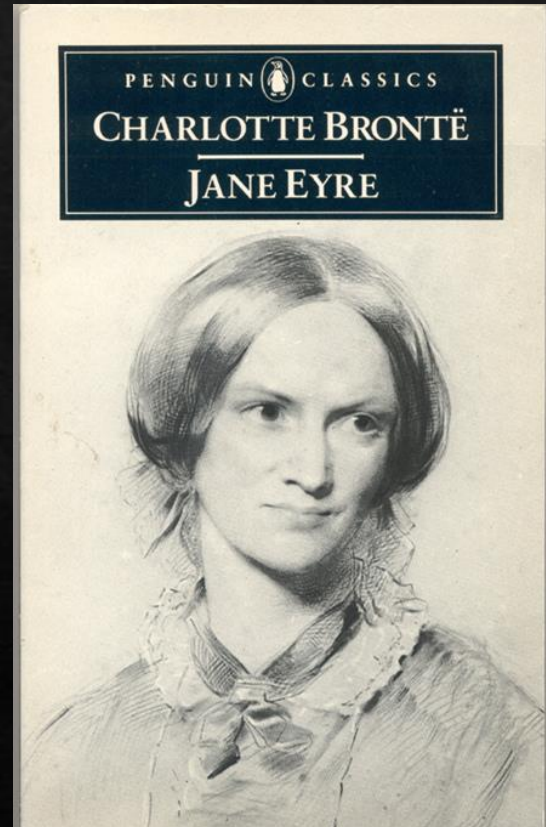
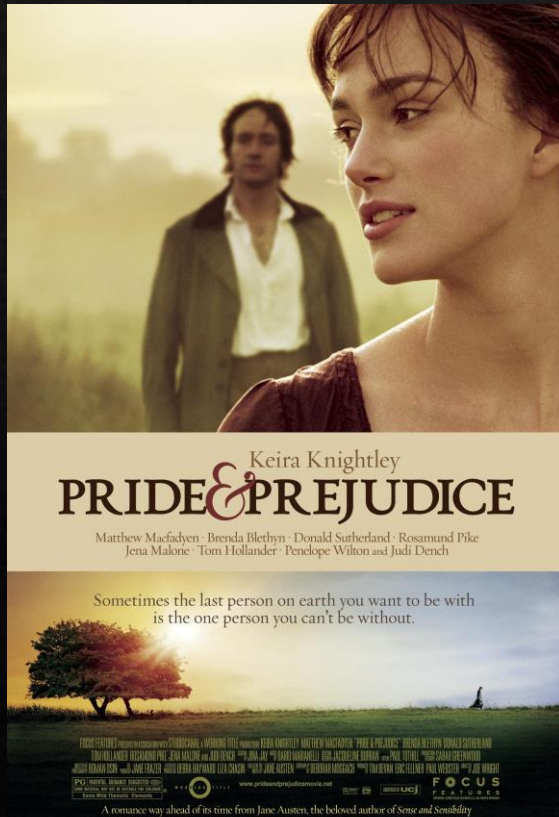
The romance novel is a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines. All romance novels contain eight narrative elements: a *definition of society*, always corrupt, that the romance novel will reform; *the meeting* between the heroine and hero; an account of their *attraction* for each other; *the barrier* between them; *the point of ritual death* [that moment in a romance novel when the union of heroine and hero seems completely impossible]; *the recognition* that fells the barrier; *the declaration* of heroine and hero that they love each other; and their *betrothal*.

A Natural History of the Romance Novel, p. 14

The Heroine's Journey

1. **The Ordinary World = Society defined:** the setting of the romantic plot is flawed or inimical to the lovers in some way.
2. **The Call to Adventure = The Meeting:** the lovers meet
3. **The Ordeal = The Barrier:** the obstacle – internal or external - preventing the fulfilment of the lovers' relationship
4. **Crossing the Threshold = The Attraction:** why the lovers pursue their relationship
5. **The Reward = The Declaration:** scene where the lovers declare their love
6. **The Ordeal = The Point of Ritual Death:** the moment when union between the lovers seems utterly impossible
7. **The Road Back = The Recognition:** the author provides new information that enables the barrier to be overcome, and sometimes allow society to be remade in a way favourable to the outcome of the romance
8. **The Return with the Elixir = The Betrothal:** the scene when the lovers make an ongoing commitment to each other

Classic romance novels and love stories that employ the heroine's journey





Definitions:

*Is the romance genre defined
by the quest plot structure?*

Definitions of the romance novel

Two basic elements comprise every romance novel: a central love story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending.

A Central Love Story: The main plot centers around individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work. A writer can include as many subplots as he/she wants as long as the love story is the main focus of the novel.

An Emotionally Satisfying and Optimistic Ending: In a romance, the lovers who risk and struggle for each other and their relationship are rewarded with emotional justice and unconditional love.

Romance novels may have any tone or style, be set in any place or time, and have varying levels of sensuality—ranging from sweet to extremely hot. These settings and distinctions of plot create specific subgenres within romance fiction.

UK Romantic Novelists Association

<https://romanticnovelistsassociation.org/about-romantic-fiction/>



[News](#) [About Romantic Fiction](#) [About the RNA](#) [Events](#) [Awards](#) [Membership](#) [F](#)



About Romantic Fiction

Romance is everywhere in fiction. From stories that focus entirely on the developing relationship between two people, to fiction that shows a budding romance as one part of the hero or heroine's journey, and into books that focus on long-standing relationships weathering storms – romantic fiction is a publishing powerhouse that reaches millions of readers every year.

Romantic fiction can offer escape from the harder moments in life, and hope for a brighter tomorrow. It can reflect our own relationships back to us, and challenge our pre-conceptions about what love looks like. It could be boy meets girl, girl meets girl, or boy meets alien – romantic fiction explores and celebrates love in all its messy, unexpected, improbable, imperfection.

Romantic fiction

- ◇ Umbrella term covering stories about romantic love that end happily or unhappily, with lovers united or parted.
- ◇ **Love story**: tale about romantic love that ends with the lovers parted
- ◇ **Romance novel**: tale about romantic love that has a “HEA” (Happily Ever After) or “HFN” (Happy For Now) ending.

Romantic fiction subgenres

Romantic fiction may be classified into various subgenres depending on setting and plot elements. The main subgenres include:

- ◇ **Contemporary**
- ◇ **Historical** : stories set more than 50 years ago
- ◇ **Fantasy/ Paranormal**: fantasy worlds or paranormal or science fiction elements are an integral part of the plot.
- ◇ **Suspense**
- ◇ **Hybrid** subgenres: mix of the above and others

Common tropes in classic romances

1. Enemies to lovers: *Pride and Prejudice*
 2. Friends to lovers: *Sense and Sensibility*
 3. “Damsel in distress” – the Cinderella story: *Persuasion*
 4. “The playboy” who is reformed: Rochester in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*
 5. Forbidden love/ “star-crossed lovers”: *Romeo and Juliet*
 6. The masquerade: *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*
- ◇ Note the heteronormativity and gender biases in 3 & 4 – recently being challenged

Genre competence and market

Genre fiction is more than the text or the story. It is a market-based industry that includes:

- ◇ Writers
- ◇ Publishers: editors, illustrators, marketing people, distributors
- ◇ Booksellers: how do they categorise different types of stories?
- ◇ Reviewers: professional and amateur, bloggers
- ◇ Readers – fans and occasional readers
- ◇ Industry-related organisations, e.g. Romance Writers of America, Romance Writers of Australia, Australian Romance Readers Association, Romantic Novelists Association, etc.
- ◇ Fan websites, e.g. Smart Bitches Trashy Books, All About Romance
- ◇ How do these groups understand the genre?

Problems with writing romantic fiction

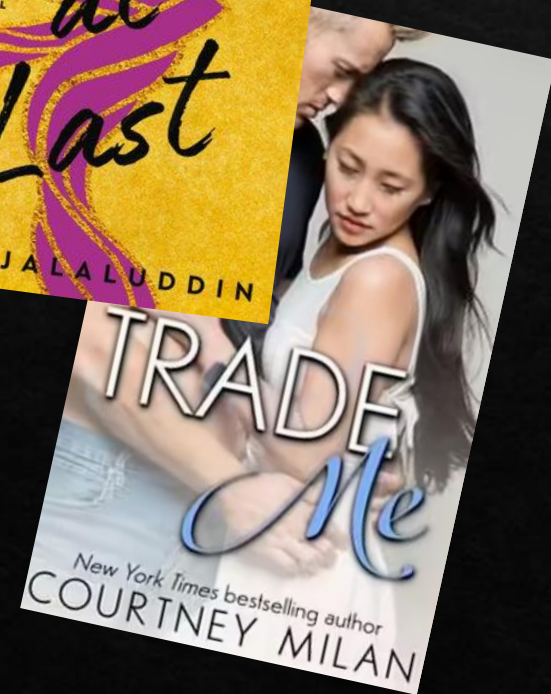
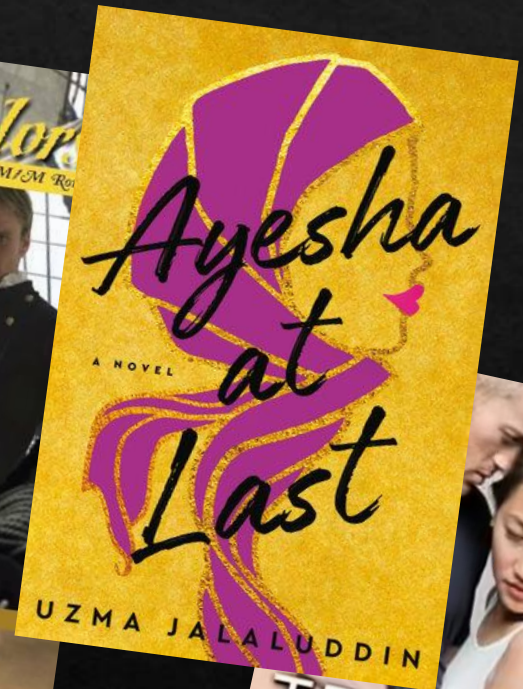
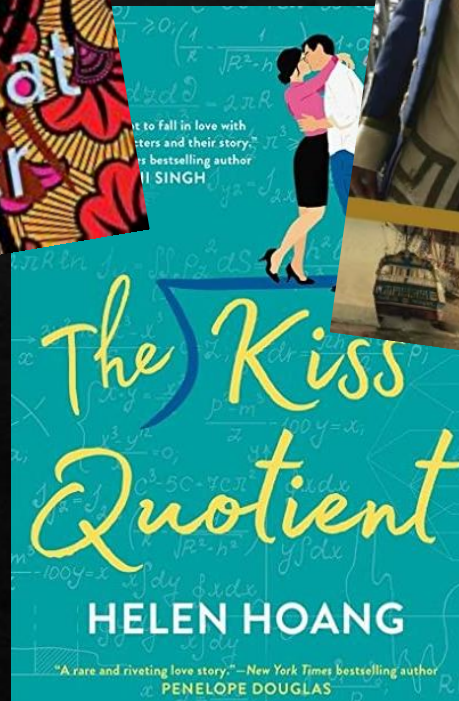
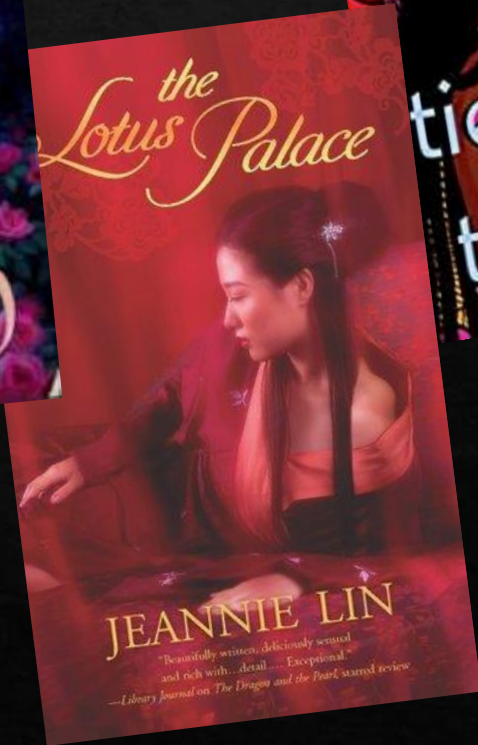
1. Clichéd writing, stale characters and plotlines vs. originality and freshness.

- ◇ There are literally millions of romance novels out there. Is it possible to develop an original plot, with unique and memorable characters, that resolves in a plausible optimistic ending?

2. Representativeness for an increasingly diverse readership.

- ◇ In the 1990s the readership was 91% female and 9% male. Today, it's 82% female and 18% male.
- ◇ Sexual and gender diversity
- ◇ Ethnic and racial diversity
- ◇ Disparity in income and education levels among romance readership

Diversity and social issues visit the romance in the 21st century



The social and historical impact of romance



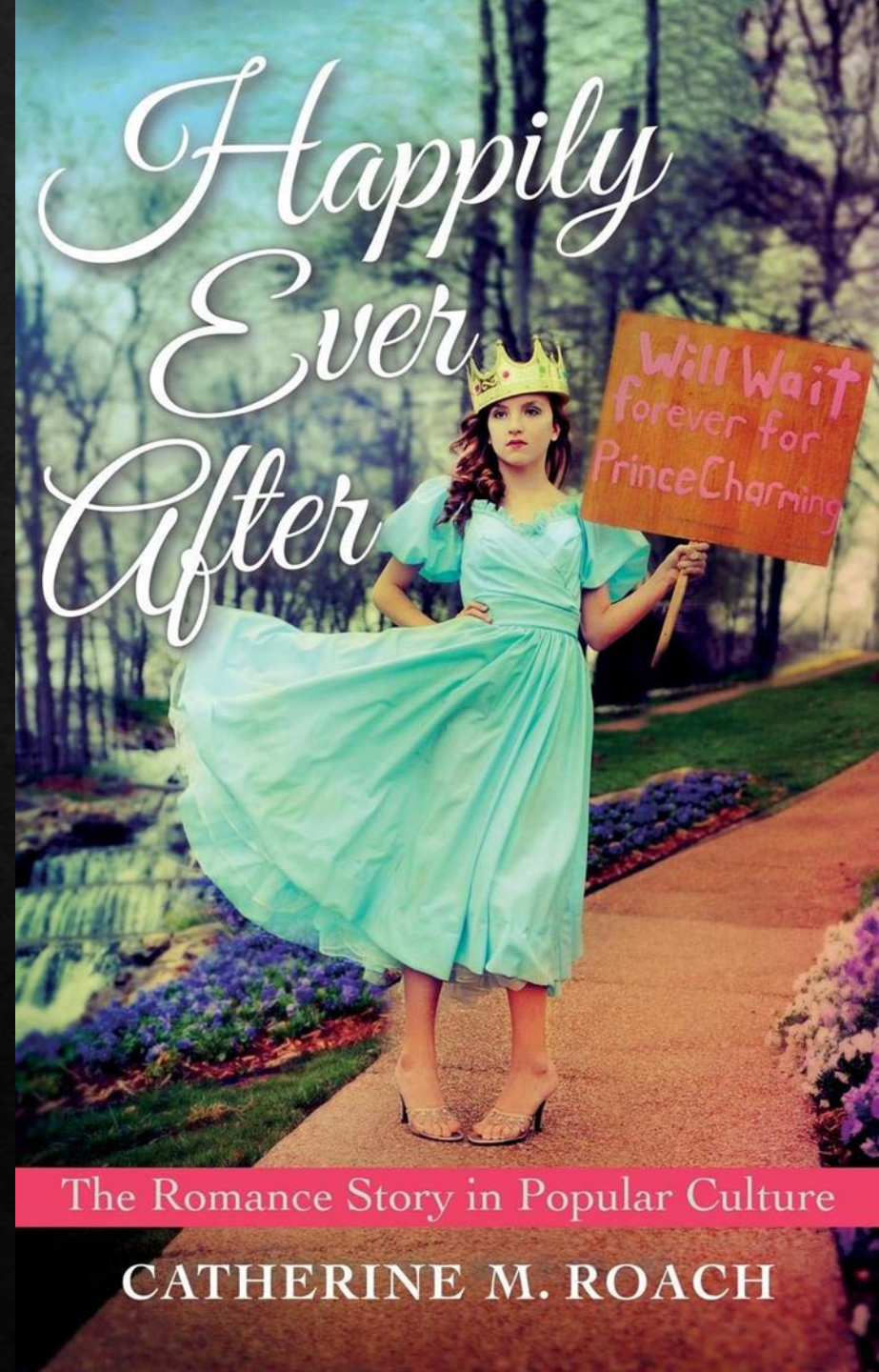
Exploring Australian history and culture through romance



- ◇ Australian **Harlequin** novels: “the beetroot in the burger” – Juliet Flesch, *From Australia With Love* (2004).
- ◇ **Rural romance**: exploring and shining a spotlight on rural issues through romance.
- ◇ **Historical**: Rewriting the Australian past through romance.

Romance: a REPARATIVE genre

- (1) IT IS HARD TO BE ALONE, especially
- (2) as a WOMAN IN A MAN'S WORLD, but
- (3) romance helps as a RELIGION OF LOVE, even though it involves
- (4) HARD WORK and
- (5) RISKS, because it leads to
- (6) HEALING,
- (7) GREAT SEX, and
- (8) HAPPINESS, and it
- (9) LEVELS THE PLAYING FIELD for women.



The Romance Story in Popular Culture

CATHERINE M. ROACH